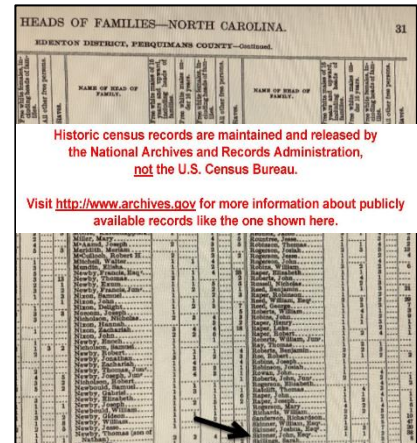


North Carolina: John Skinner

Born on October 7, 1760, in Hertford, NC, John Skinner spent the majority of his life serving the people of both Perquimans County and North Carolina, where his family had been among the first settlers in 1688. During the American Revolution, Skinner fought as a soldier in the North Carolina Continental Line, yet his professional success came after the war.¹⁴⁸

Between 1784 and 1787, Skinner represented the people of Perquimans County in the legislative branch of North Carolina's state government. Because of his success as a state congressman, Skinner served on the Governor's Council and played an active role in both of North Carolina's conventions to ratify the U.S. Constitution (July 21-August 4, 1788 & November 16-23, 1789).¹⁴⁹ Perhaps Skinner's history of public service in his local community and his support for the U.S. Constitution contributed to President Washington's decision to appoint him as North Carolina's first U.S. marshal on June 8, 1790.

This did not give Skinner and his name much time to conduct the 1790 census in a timely manner. The delay in Skinner's appointment occurred because North Carolina did not ratify the U.S. Constitution until November 23, 1789, almost two months after the majority of the marshals had already received their appointments.¹⁵⁰ Despite this minor inconvenience, Skinner and his 15 deputies completed their enumeration sometime before September 5, 1791, the initial deadline that Congress established for the completion of the 1790 census.¹⁵¹ ¹⁵² Collectively, Skinner and his deputies found 393,751 people living in North Carolina, making it the third largest state in the young nation.¹⁵³



HEADS OF FAMILIES—NORTH CAROLINA.
EDENTON DISTRICT, PERQUIMANS COUNTY—Continued.

Historic census records are maintained and released by the National Archives and Records Administration, not the U.S. Census Bureau.

Visit <http://www.archives.gov> for more information about publicly available records like the one shown here.

The table contains multiple columns for demographic data. A red arrow points to the entry for John Skinner, who is listed as the head of a household.

John Skinner's name on the transcribed version of the 1790 census schedule

Courtesy of Heads of Families/1790/A Century of Population Growth North Carolina

¹⁴⁸ "History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of North Carolina: John Skinner," U.S. marshals Service, last estimated release October 24, 2019, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/history/firstmarshals/skinner.htm>. (Accessed October 24, 2019).

¹⁴⁹ Michael Hill, "Skinner, John: 7 Oct. 1760–31 Dec. 1819," in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979-1996), 5:NA. Retrieved from <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/skinner-john>. (Accessed October 24, 2019).

¹⁵⁰ "History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of North Carolina: John Skinner."

¹⁵¹ "Assistant marshals for the state [North Carolina]: 1790," in *Heads of Families/1790/A Century of Population Growth North Carolina* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907), 11:10.

¹⁵² *Gazette of the United-States*. [volume] (New-York [N.Y.]), 10 March 1790.

¹⁵³ "North Carolina". *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one*, pg. 52-53. PDF. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/1793/dec/number-of-persons.htm>. (Accessed October 24, 2019).



Map of North Carolina c. 1805.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

While Skinner and his deputies completed their overall mission pertaining to the 1790 census, Skinner's census return provides evidence that the lack of a standard procedure and forms did affect the census.¹⁵⁴ At the bottom of his 1790 census return, Skinner noted that his deputies only counted the population of each county in North Carolina. He wrote, "The marshal...////...is satisfied that not one town in North Carolina contains more than 2,000 inhabitants".¹⁵⁵ This highlights how the marshals and their deputies took a certain amount of liberty with their methodology for conducting the census. Perhaps, Skinner also felt

rushed to complete the enumeration of North Carolina's population because of his worries about being financially penalized if he failed to deliver his 1790 census return by the official deadline.¹⁵⁶

Ultimately, Skinner served his four-year term as a U.S. marshal, then two more terms in the state legislature in 1794 and 1797. These were the last times he worked as a public servant, before returning to his private business enterprises which included tobacco, a flour mill, a baker house, and a fishery.¹⁵⁷ ¹⁵⁸ Skinner died on December 31, 1819 at the age of 50 at his home, Montpelier, in Chowan County, NC.

¹⁵⁴ W.S. Rossiter, "The First Census of the United States," pg. 47.

¹⁵⁵ "North Carolina," *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one*, pg. 53.

¹⁵⁶ *Gazette of the United-States*. [volume] (New-York [N.Y.]), 10 March 1790. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030483/1790-03-10/ed-1/seq-1/>. (Accessed October 25, 2019).

¹⁵⁷ "History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of North Carolina: John Skinner."

¹⁵⁸ Michael Hill, "Skinner, John: 7 Oct. 1760–31 Dec. 1819."